



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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DEQ anticipates statewide effect from new ozone standard

BATON ROUGE – Louisiana has seen the number of parishes that fail to meet federal air-quality standards drop from 20 in 1978 to only five currently. However, that number will probably increase sometime this week when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announces a new, nationwide standard for the pollutant ozone.

The current standard for ozone is 80 parts per billion on an eight-hour rotation scale known as the eight-hour standard. If EPA changes that level to 75 ppb, then 26 parishes will fail to meet the standard, or be “out of attainment,” for the new ozone standard.

“This upcoming announcement does not mean that the air quality is suddenly worse than it was before the action,” said Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality Assistant Secretary Lou Buatt. “Some areas that will be classified as out of attainment will probably see some ramifications from this ruling. However, the air quality in Louisiana continues to improve and the department will continue to work for better air quality no matter what the standard is.”

The EPA requires areas that fail to meet air-quality standards to implement certain regulations in an effort to lower the overall air pollution levels, which for Louisiana is the pollutant ozone. Some businesses may be required to have certain air permits that they were previously not required to have. Also some businesses that want to expand may have to take extra measures or face new restrictions. In the Baton Rouge area, residents pay additional charges when they renew their vehicle inspection stickers for procedures geared at controlling vehicle emissions. Gas stations have to take required steps to minimize leaks from the pump and to control vapors.

Ozone is not emitted. It is an air pollutant that is formed when volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides combine to react with sunlight on warm, stagnant days. The chemicals needed to form ozone come from a variety of sources, such as cars, chemical plants and lawnmowers.

“There have been enormous efforts from state, local and federal governments, as well as many environmentally minded citizens to improve the air,” Buatt said. “I foresee this trend continuing.”

Past state and federal regulations have included lowering permitted pollution standards for industry, implementing cleaner fuels for gas-powered motors and increasing air-monitoring capability in ozone-prone areas. DEQ has also formed an Ozone Action program that informs citizens, industry and local governments if high levels of ozone are forecast. People then take voluntary steps such as carpooling, driving less and not mowing their yards until after 6 p.m. to help limit air pollution.

To view tips on the voluntary steps you can take, to see what consequences a nonattainment area may face, or to see what parishes will be out of attainment at 75 ppb, go to www.deq.louisiana.gov.